THE DEVIL AND THE SACRED IN ENGLISH DRAMA, 1350–1642

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CHAPTER ONE

Stage devils and oppositional thinking

Aside from human beings, nothing was staged more continuously in early English drama than the devil and his minions. For about 300 years – from the late fourteenth century to the late seventeenth – playwrights regularly put devils on stage in every kind of English play for every kind of audience, whether aristocratic, popular, or commercial. Long after they stopped seeing God and the angels, audiences continued to see devils on stage, and there was no appreciable decline in opportunities to do so on the London commercial stage before the closing of the theatres in 1642. That devils should have so long outlived other characters produced by traditional dramaturgy has neither been noticed nor explained in the critical record, yet it is a singular fact. This book explores both questions: why devils are the last explicit remnant of continuous traditions in staging the sacred, and why no one has recognized that they are.

One reason devils endured on stage was that the material base of culture changed very little throughout the time they were popular: the slow pace of economic and technological change meant that costumes and the materials for assembling them remained the same.[1] "The devill in his fethers" (presumably black feathers) appears in costuming lists from Chester, both for the mystery plays and for the annual Midsummer Show, which reputedly endured from 1499 to the 1670s.[2] At Coventry a charge is recorded "for making ye demones head" in 1543 and "for a yard of canvas for ye devylles mall [maul]" in 1544.[3] "The dymons cote" (p. 240), "the devells hose" (p. 246), "pwyntes [points (for attaching the hose to the doublet)] for the deman" (p. 218), and "a stafe for the deman" (p. 238) add details to the picture at Coventry. The St. John's College Cambridge Register of Inventories lists "ij blak develles cootes with hornes" in 1548–49.[4] A dangerous variation on the devil's canvas maul is recorded at Tamworth on Corpus Christi Day, 1536, where "an actor playing the Devil . . . came with his chain by one of the spectators, Sir Humfrey Ferrers, the lord of Tamworth Castle, and unwittingly broke his shins with it."[5] The earliest reference to devils' costumes discovered

so far is from York in 1433, where "garmentes," "faces," and "Vesernes [visors]" for devils are listed;[6] the latest before the closing of the theatres is from Thomas Nabbes' masque, *Microcosmus* in 1637, where a stage direction specifies "A divell in a black robe: haire, wreath and wings black."[7] The wings were presumably made of black feathers.

This relatively stable material base of costuming and props was less important in perpetuating stage devils, however, than the mental world that originated them in the first place. The outlook in which demonology flourished has recently been described in detail by Stuart Clark as it affected science, history, religion, and politics throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[8] Clark comments that demonology "was construed dialectically in terms of what it was not; what was significant about it was not its substance but the system of oppositions that it established and fulfilled" (p. 9). These oppositions, moreover, were hierarchical, beginning with God and the devil, and embracing a series of parallels: good and evil, truth and illusion, community and chaos, baptized and non-baptized, belief and heresy. The flexibility of binary thinking was both its strength and its greatest weakness, Clark argues: while almost anything could be made to fit the model of hierarchical polar oppositions, their infinite confirmability made them unstable. Traditional oppositional thinking therefore endured an extended crisis in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

> In the case of demonology, the dominance of privileged first terms set in hierarchical opposition to their contraries was for a long time successful in yielding coherent and persuasive arguments. However, once the two reformations were under way the very enthusiasm with which writers of different religious persuasions gave authenticating roles to devils betrayed the instability of the logic involved. (p. 147)

What was true of devils per se was equally true, as we shall see, of devils on the stage.

Recognizing the crisis caused by the Protestant and Counter Reformations as *extended*, however, is important. The habit of oppositional thinking did not collapse as soon as Protestants turned the tables on traditional religion by identifying it as idolatrous and demonic. Thinking in opposed hierarchical polarities was so deeply ingrained that it characterized both sides of the religious divide for a long time, with almost no recognition of the incongruities involved. Though virtually all the devil plays discussed in the following pages invite deconstructive analysis by virtue of their oppositional thinking, only Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* deliberately exploits the resulting instability.

One of the principal reasons for the failure of modern criticism to recognize and explain the durability of stage devils has been the misreading of traditional assumptions about a polarized world. Primary credit for this failure belongs to E. K. Chambers, who first read early drama according to a different model altogether – a teleological pattern of gradually developing secularization.[9] Stage devils were important for Chambers, because they were a key element in his theory. The earlier he could find evidence of secularization, the more credible was his claim that change was incremental, progressive, and aimed where he thought it was. He therefore regarded the "relaxing of the close bonds between the nascent drama and religious worship" as the earliest form of secularization, and he found this "relaxation" in the expansion of early liturgical tropes to include other biblical material, the movement of the plays out of the church, the innovation of lay control and financing, the replacement of Latin with the vernacular, and the appearance of folk-play elements – especially devils – in the biblical stories told by vernacular drama:

> For your horned and blackened devil is the same personage, with the same vague tradition of the ancient heathen festival about him, whether he riots it through the cathedral aisles in the Feast of Fools, or hales the Fathers to limbo and harries the forward spectators in the marketplace of Beverley or Wakefield.[10]

Chambers' belief that devils were among the first indications of the secular in early English drama made him incapable of seeing them as one of the last vestiges of traditional sacred dramaturgy in the seventeenth century.

More than thirty years ago, O. B. Hardison pointed out that Chambers' assumptions about early drama derived from social Darwinism and its evolutionary preoccupations.[11] Chambers regarded secularization as progressive, Hardison argued, because "he lived in an age when Christianity was suspect" (p. 14). A romantic conception of vital but repressed pagan folk culture informed Chambers' view of stage devils (they are vestiges of "the ancient heathen festival"), and the reassertion of this culture against oppressive pre-Reformation Christianity was, for Chambers, one of the first signs of healthy secularization in drama. Chambers' thinking is thus marked by a "strong polarity," as Hardison points out (p. 15), that is foreign to the drama he was trying to understand. The primary terms in Chambers' hierarchical binary rhetoric are not God and the devil, but pagan (the favored term) and Christian, followed closely by a series of supporting terms: "braved," "won," "sportive," and

"deep-rooted instinct" on the positive side, opposing "bishops," "barbarians," "gaolers," "ban," "triumphed," and "barred," on the side of the church.[12]

Chambers did not invent the oppositional system that Hardison identifies; rather, Chambers inherited it as a derivative from the very system he failed to recognize in the early drama he studied. For binary thinking did not collapse in the eighteenth century, as Clark suggests.[13] Instead, the deep-rooted sense of certainty that it had provided was transmuted into a new system, in which the favored terms were "secular," "progressive," "rational," "modern," and the like, in opposition to "religious," "backward," "enthusiastic," "medieval." We can see these two incommensurate binary systems in transition and in collision with one another in the eighteenth century.[14] James Sharpe recounts a trial in Hertfordshire in 1751, when Thomas Colley was found guilty and hanged for seizing and drowning Ruth Osborne on suspicion of witchcraft.[15] Before his execution, Colley was visited in prison by one who sought to persuade him that "witches had no manner of existence but in the minds of poor infatuated people, in which they had been confirm'd by the tradition of their ancestors, as foolish and crazy as themselves" (p. 3). Colley's well-meaning visitor speaks from within the new system of oppositional thinking, dividing the world along lines of reason and enlightenment, seeking to dispel centuries of infatuated folly and craziness. On the other hand, after Colley's hanging, many who heard of it, believed "it was a very hard case, that a man shold be hang'd for destroying an old wicked woman, who had done so much mischief by her abominable charms and witchcraft" (p. 4). These people viewed Colley's execution from within the old system, dividing the world between God and the devil.

Chambers' binary thinking descends, then, from the Enlightenment, where it developed as a way of grounding rational confidence against the archaic polarities it replaced. Secular knowledge based on reason and experiment came to oppose sacred ignorance, as illustrated in the deists' rejection of "priestcraft," a rejection which was itself a legacy of radical Protestant anticlericalism in the seventeenth century and of the early Protestant Reformers' rejection of traditional clergy and ritual as "superstitious." For Chambers, the added feature is that Darwin and the social Darwinists had transferred the teleology of sacred history (already secularized in Hegel's historical "spirit") into biological and social evolution, in such a way that the hierarchical superior in the Enlightenment binary system seemed bound to flourish in the long run. Reason would

inevitably defeat ignorance; the secular would inevitably defeat "other-worldliness" and superstition. Writing from the heart of the British Empire at the height of its success, the social evolutionary assumption that the fittest survive seemed obvious to Chambers, and it was apparent that the fittest culture had evolved along with enlightened English Protestantism: anti-Catholic, secularized, and favorable to individual freedom of conscience.

In short, Chambers' inability to understand traditional oppositional thinking was due to the Enlightenment transformation of an earlier mental world into a new set of binary assumptions. Moreover the latter have remained active in assessments of early drama, even though Chambers' argument has been repudiated. Chambers' continuing influence is due, in part, to the inspiration (complementing that of Darwin and Herbert Spencer) of Jules Michelet, who first proposed in *La Sorcière* (1862) that vestigial pagan folk customs were the focus of peasant revolt against ecclesiastical and feudal authority.[16] The Romantic basis of Michelet's thesis needs no emphasis, and its debt to Enlightenment binary thinking in the French Revolution is clear. Michelet's influence has been considerable in modern attempts to understand witchcraft, especially when witchcraft has been interpreted romantically as a form of populist or feminist resistance, but Michelet has not been adequately recognized as a factor in the study of early drama.

Despite Hardison's critique, Chambers' legacy with regard to stage devils remains largely unquestioned. The first broad challenge to Chambers came in the important revisionist work of Bernard Spivack and David Bevington, writing just after the middle of the century, yet both retained a narrative of organic incremental development with secularization as its goal.[17] The concept of the "hybrid morality," for example, is important to Spivack and Bevington as a mid-sixteenth-century phase in the gradual development of dramatic characterization, from the personified abstractions inspired by Christian morality to the represented human beings inspired by secular observation.

Most striking is the perpetuation of Chambers' Victorian and Whig liberal assumptions in the neo-Marxist criticism of Robert Weimann, who has been a Trojan horse for Enlightenment antinomies within the ramparts of postmodernism. Weimann is most responsive to Michelet, arguing that a vestigial pagan folk tradition found expression in clowns, Vices, stage devils, the doctor of St. George plays, and the gargantuan feasts of shepherd plays in the mystery cycles as various expressions of peasant resistance to high culture. Weimann sees devils' and personified

vices' proximity to the audience as encouraging subversive identification and sympathy with ostensibly anti-social behavior, blasphemy, and heterodoxy. For heresy was "inevitably and inextricably entangled with attempts on the social order, always anarchic, always political."[18] The soliloquies, knowing asides, and down-stage comic antics of demonic figures were all means of taking auditors into the confidence of an anti-establishment viewpoint, engaging them on its side and creating distance from the more formal, "correct," and socially elevated characters of the main action. In Weimann's view, the social function of devils is to provide a subversive expression for class frustration and protest – a function closely analogous to the one described by Chambers and ultimately indebted to Michelet. Also influential in some postmodern criticism has been the historical work of Keith Thomas, who identifies the purpose of pre-Reformation ritual with that of magic and compares magic unfavorably with science and technology, thus offering another version of the Enlightenment polarity exhibited in Chambers.[19] Thomas' influence on Stephen Greenblatt is explicit, and Greenblatt's ideas about exorcism are considered below in chapter 8.[20]

My purpose in what follows is not to argue that secularization had no effect on the history of early drama, and particularly on stage devils. Rather, what I propose is a way of conceptualizing secularization that recovers some sense of traditional oppositional thinking without falling into the polarization and tendentiousness of Enlightenment and Romantic assumptions. John Sommerville's argument for a nuanced and sociologically informed theory of secularization is helpful. He contrasts "a people whose religious rituals are so woven into the fabric of their life that they could not separate religion from the rest of their activities" with "a society in which religion is a matter of conscious beliefs, important primarily for the times of one's most philosophical and poetic solitude."[21] The first is a "sacred" culture; the second, "secular."[22] Looked at this way, the story of English secularization effectively begins with Henry VIII, because Henry originated a process that formally defined the power and influence of religion apart from the influence of other social and political institutions (especially the monarchy) and eventually separated them. Where secularization is concerned, Henry's declaring himself the head of the church was not a uniting of monarchy and church but a delimiting of religion from its traditional permeation of cultural life, a subordination of this newly distinct entity under the crown, a consequent redefinition of the church in national terms, and a promotion of a non-ecclesiastical office (the monarchy) to

unprecedented charismatic ascendancy. The material impact of this process was immediate and dramatic, beginning with the transfer of ecclesiastical real estate to Henry's "new men" and proceeding with the way people refashioned their worship spaces, spent their money, distributed largesse to the poor (or sought relief, if they were poor), lived virtually every facet of their daily lives, and died.[23] But eventually the impact was intellectual and psychological as well, and it is the latter effect that we see at work in the secularization of early English drama and particularly in the secularization of stage devils.[24]

To see Henry VIII as the effective originator of secularization in English life is to see the situation before him very differently from the way Chambers does. Viewing stage devils as a separation of the sacred from the secular is understandable from an evolutionary and secularized Protestant perspective, but as Sommerville points out,

> the devil is as much a part of the realm of the supernatural as is God. The secular or profane realm contains only everyday beings, not those remarkable for their diabolic character. An inversion of religion in sacrilege, desecration, or sorcery is not evidence of secularization, however bad-mannered. In medieval England, hostility toward some aspect of religion was often expressed in religious terms. The evidence of thorough-going secularization, on the other hand, is to be found in indifference, even though it might be respectful to the Church. (p. 10)

Technically, as we shall see, the devil was not supernatural; he was merely superhuman. In pre-Reformation England, however, he was indeed as much a part of the sacred outlook as God was. He was ubiquitous, because his opposition to God accounted for everything that was wrong, not merely in obvious moral or religious terms (committing the seven deadly sins or sacrilege) but in sickness, death, accidents, crop failure, and social conflict. One of the major purposes of religious activity throughout one's life, from baptism to the last rites, was therefore to reject and defeat the devil, and innumerable liturgical celebrations in the course of every year performed the same purpose for the community. In the traditional society that produced early religious drama, encounters with the devil were deeply involved in the ritual life of the community.[25] Indeed, everyone first encountered the devil without being aware of it and without being able to do anything about it. The doctrine of original sin was construed to mean that newborns literally belonged to the devil, and the baptismal rite therefore involved an exorcism that was designed to expel the devil from the infant to be baptized, whom the rite claimed, instead, for Christ and the Christian community: "Taken

together, the rituals of expulsion, repudiation, and prophylaxis or apotropaism formed a series of ceremonies that dramatized in a striking way the very real struggle that every Christian waged with the devil."[26] Every infant had to be reclaimed for Christ from God's opposite, a cosmic and personal enemy who was malign and dangerous, the source of childhood illness, accidents, death, and deformity, dramatically apostrophized by the presiding priest at baptism as "cursed devil."[27]

The dramatic encounter at baptism, marking the beginning of the Christian life, was repeated even more forcefully at the end of life, on everyone's deathbed, especially in the late Middle Ages. This culture's preoccupation with death is well known, evident in the flourishing of the *ars moriendi*, the dance of death, and the intense interest in purgatory and indulgences. Such a preoccupation was doubtless fostered by the Black Death and recurring bouts of the plague, but it may also have been encouraged by the explosion of wealth, which preachers denounced at every social level, reminding their charges of life's brevity and the consequent obligation to prepare well for their end.[28] That members of the clergy were themselves, in many cases, prime beneficiaries of the new wealth obviates neither the force of moral admonitions that came from the church nor of its provisions for everyone at the end of life.

What was true at baptism was also true in dying, when the preserving power of Christ was pitted against the fearful onslaught of Satan and his followers, which was stronger in one's ultimate weakness than at any previous time of life. This was because the approach of death was accompanied by strong temptation to doubt the efficacy of the Christian graces and the saving power of God, as Shakespeare still remembers at the end of the sixteenth century, when he has King Henry VI pray for the dying Bishop of Winchester:

> O thou eternal mover of the heavens,
> Look with a gentle eye upon this wretch!
> O, beat away the busy meddling fiend
> That lays strong siege unto this wretch's soul,
> And from his bosom purge this black despair![29]

The presence of the devil at the deathbed is depicted in illustrations that accompanied the *ars moriendi* throughout the fifteenth century and that reached even those who could not read in the form of block prints produced by the early printers. As Eamon Duffy points out, these prints "portrayed the deathbed as the centre of an epic struggle for the soul of the Christian, in which the Devil bent all his strength to turn the soul

from Christ and His cross to self-loathing or self-reliance."[30] In dramatic opposition to the devil, the ministering priest held aloft a crucifix, displaying the power of the passion as the site of Christ's defeat of Satan on behalf of humankind and encouraging the dying to appropriate that power on their own behalf.

The material impact of the oppositional preoccupation with choosing God and resisting the devil at the end of life went beyond the production of manuscripts, books, and block prints. It is no exaggeration to say that much of what we think of as characteristically late medieval was shaped by this concern. A large proportion of new wealth was expended in gifts to parish churches and private chapels, with the intent of demonstrating the piety of those who had earned it and thereby preparing the donor's case for being loosely attached to earthly goods at the time of deathbed reckoning and the Day of Judgment. Every visitor to Westminster Abbey is aware of Henry VII's gifts to create a magnificent new chapel with fantailed vaulting, but Henry's prudent generosity did not end so close to the royal domain. His gifts to Great St. Mary's in Cambridge are no less important as pious contributions to the university church, though Christopher Brooke has recently discovered evidence that the munificence attributed to Henry may actually have been bestowed by Richard III.[31] The point is not which king deserves credit but that both were so determined to establish it. Henry's story could be told many times over for thousands of other lay Christians in the late Middle Ages. No doubt conspicuous consumption played a part in such gifts as well, but to assert that nothing more impelled them is to miss the religious dimension of the social context that gave rise to them.

Displays of personal generosity were impossible for the poor, of course, but as a vernacular preacher made clear, the poor were at less obvious peril on their deathbeds and the Day of Doom, because they had fewer earthly goods to tempt them into worldly complacency: "Tho[gh] god sende the litill, thou art never the lesse beholden unto hym for too skilles. On ys, thou haste the lesse to yeve hym accountes of at the daye of dome; and anothur, the lesse ioye that thou haste in this worlde, the more thou shalte have in heven."[32] A common theme of medieval preaching was Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats, distinguished from one another on the Day of Judgment by their consideration for the poor and dispossesed, and dramatic renderings of the same parable are also a prominent part of all the Judgment plays in the extant mystery cycles, where the devil claims those who did not repent their willful commitment to luxurious consumption at the expense of others.

An efficacious deathbed struggle against the devil was not, then, the prerogative of the rich. It was a spiritual struggle that confronted everyone, and material donations were expressions of charity that prepared one to face the devil on the deathbed. Though the poor (who were, of course, the majority of the population) were unable to display their charity to the community in the manner of their wealthy neighbors, they were allotted a place in every parish's memory of those who had contributed against the day of reckoning. For the names of all donors were entered on the parish bede roll, no matter how small the donation, and prayers were offered every Sunday for the souls of those named there. Moreover, during the annual requiem for benefactors of the parish, the name of each contributor was read aloud by the priest, from those who had built or remodeled the church to those who had given two-pence (Duffy, pp. 334–35). No one, in short, was denied an opportunity to prepare for resisting the devil at death by expressing charity through material generosity.

Birth and death were not the only times when pre-Reformation Christians were aware of the devil's malignant opposition. Between the beginning and the end of the Christian life, marked by the ordeals of baptism and dying, everyone ritually encountered the devil repeatedly as a frightening opponent in the course of an agrarian cycle that derived its ultimate meaning from the liturgy. Despite the rapid growth of towns in the late Middle Ages, the vast bulk of the population still made its living from the land, and the rhythms of agricultural life dominated European consciousness. What the liturgy provided, then, cannot be accurately described as merely spiritual comfort. In a way that is characteristic of sacred culture, the liturgy also profoundly shaped consciousness about material life on a daily basis, where the power of ritual experience was involved with life, death, and wellbeing:

> What that power procured was the salvation of man; or, to recapture the larger overtones of the word *salus*, the deliverance of the Christian from the whole concatenation of dooms, dangers, anxieties and tribulations which loomed over him in his corporal as in his spiritual existence: overtones more exactly rendered by the German *Heil* than by any English equivalent.[33]

The most important half of the liturgical year was the period between Advent and Easter, which had come to include, by the late Middle Ages, Ascension, Whitsunday, and Corpus Christi.[34] During this time a sequence of feast days commemorated the life, passion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, which were definitively efficacious in the cosmic defeat of Satan. The correspondence of this period with the time

between the winter and summer solstices meant that the communal remembering of Christ's cosmic suffering and victory occurred at a time of year when suffering from cold and a meager food supply was also endured and came to an end. Still, that coincidence does not mean that the "real" significance of the liturgical celebrations was a residual pagan fertility rite, as Chambers inferred. It is more accurate to say that the real meaning of assimilated fertility rites and the community's survival of the passing seasons' hardships had long since become Christian.[35]

In any case, the Christocentric feasts openly re-enact the cosmic victory of Christ over Satan in innumerable ways. The concluding Christmas feast, for example, was Candlemas, celebrated on February 2, commemorating the purification of Mary and the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple. The name of the feast derives from the candles carried in a procession of the worshipers and presented for blessing to the priest, along with a penny donation. The prayer accompanying the blessing explicitly identifies its apotropaic function, asking that wherever the candle "shall be lit or set up, the devil may flee away in fear and trembling with all his ministers, out of those dwellings, and never presume again to disquiet your servants" (Duffy, p. 16). On Palm Sunday, the yew, box, or willow branches carried in elaborate procession were similarly blessed and were similarly efficacious in banishing the devil (Duffy, p. 23).

One of the most elaborate annual feasts was Rogation, the only liturgical procession retained by the sixteenth-century Reformers, celebrated for three successive days before Ascension, the sixth Thursday after Easter. The Rogation procession was the most extensive of all, for it followed the entire parish perimeter, or "bounds," with church banners, bells, singing, readings from the gospels by the priest, and pauses at wayside crosses, all designed to cleanse the parish of evil influences and bless the fields. On the first two days the procession was preceded by a dragon, whose tail was shorn away for the third day's procession, symbolizing the overthrow of the great dragon, Satan (Duffy, p. 279). The gospel reading for Ascension Day, immediately following Rogation, helped to link the two feasts, for it was Mark 5, the story of Jesus' exorcism of the man possessed by a demon (Duffy, p. 217). Like some other Christian feasts, this springtime celebration originated as a counterpart to a pagan festivity (the Roman Robigalia), specifically designed to promote fertility, and the fertility implications of Rogation itself are obvious.[36] The point, again, is neither that Rogation was really a "heathen festival," in Chambers' phrase, nor that the liturgical calendar was spiritual and irrelevant to the material lives of agricultural

communities. On the contrary, the meaning of material life was derived from Christian ritual. Alasdair MacIntyre makes a similar point when he discusses moral thinking in traditional societies, or what Sommerville calls "sacred" societies, where "religion was characteristically not a separate segregable aspect of life . . . but was rather the mode in which every aspect of life was related to the divine."[37] Certainly the motivations that accompanied a three-day procession and feast on the part of the entire parish must have been remarkably various – at least as various as the motivations that prompt Chaucer's springtime pilgrims. Still, the assimilation of a wide variety of motives to Rogation's drama of the cosmic Christian struggle is unmistakable.

Many non-Christocentric feasts in the liturgical year were equally charged with power to oppose evil, though less clearly linked to a symbolic sequence of the seasonal cycle. Michaelmas (September 29) celebrated the eschatological binding of Satan and all his forces, a future victory that was anticipated daily by St. Michael's presence at the deathbed, where faith was most severely tested by demonic power. On All Souls' eve (November 1), the parish bells rang till midnight, and consecrated candles were burned in windows to ward off demonic power. The stories of particular saints, usually honored locally, invariably recalled God's power over demons, either in a saint's life or by means of a saint in the life of someone else: St. Mary Magdalen had seven devils exorcized from her by Jesus himself; St. Agnes successfully interceded for the life of a prefect's son who had been strangled by demons; St. Margaret was swallowed by the devil in the form of a dragon, which she exploded by making the sign of the cross (Duffy, pp. 172–73). The folktale attributes of hagiography are obvious; the point is that all the saints' legends, no matter how naive, are consistently oppositional in their thinking, identifying Satan as the cosmic enemy, the source of all harm and the ultimate threat to all good things.

In short, recent social historical descriptions of traditional pre-Reformation Christianity yield a very different view of the devil from the one that Chambers entertained, and the impact of that view on early drama will be a primary theme in the pages that follow. Chambers' distinction between liturgical and vernacular drama is certainly untenable where devils are concerned, because devils are also active in Latin liturgical drama, which should not be surprising, given the function of the liturgy and the sacraments in opposing the devil. As early as the ninth century, in the *Ordo Dedicationis Ecclesiae* used by the bishop of Metz, the devil was exorcised in the process of consecrating the building, much as

devils were exorcised from unbaptized children. In the surviving text of this service, the bishop stops three times in procession before the north portal of the church and makes the demand that the Gospel of Nicodemus had associated with the harrowing of hell: "Tollite portas . . . et introibit rex gloriae," to which one inside the church responds, "Quis est iste rex gloriae?" After the third exchange, the one in the church leaves "quasi fugiens."[38] Diabolus also asks the same impertinent question twice in the early thirteenth-century *Ordo Paschalis* from Klosterneuberg (Young 1:425, 428). In a more explicit rendering of the harrowing, a Bamberg service book from 1587 again requires that one "qui Diaboli personam simulans" recite the antiphon, "Quis est iste Rex gloriae?" (Young, 1:174). To be sure, this is a late example and may reflect the influence of vernacular plays on the same theme. But the example still makes the point that devils were admissible in liturgical plays, where they performed the same function that they performed in other early drama. In a fourteenth-century *ordinarium* on the ascension of Christ from Moosburg, an "image of the devil" is cast down "with abominable fires of sulphur and pitch, or with the colors of waters mixed in and with other things" in contrast to the effigy of Christ, which is raised to the top of the church by a rope (Young, 1:487; my translation). Diaboli also appear in the late twelfth-century *Ludus de Nativitate* and *Ludus de Passione* from Benediktbeurn.[39] In every case these devils are additions to the biblical story, but in no case are they "secular" detractions from it; on the contrary, they illuminate the stories in which they appear by making explicit the devil's opposition to Christ, in whose name the devil is defeated by the Christian social body and banished from it.

The modified story of secularization that I am suggesting has not been anticipated by others who have responded to Chambers, though interpreters who are more sympathetic than Chambers to the plays' religious subjects have argued that stage devils are consistent with structural and thematic patterns of the plays' informing theology. This view of devils has taken various forms, as Chambers' view has, from V. A. Kolve's argument that laughter at devils in a modern production of the Towneley cycle provided a "comedy of victory" over evil, to Hans-Jürgen Diller's analysis of "speech forms" to demonstrate that the "harsh, bitter, and funny" realism of the *platea* "is part of the original make-up of the genre, not a late, popular and irrelevant addition."[40] While Diller acknowledges the social ambiguities of devils and their human accomplices, Kolve puts evil creatures firmly in their social place, arguing that comedy gives them their due only at the bottom of the

cosmic hierarchy: "God is in control, the evil and the demonic behave stupidly because that is their nature, and the proper reaction to this example of the rightness of things is laughter."[41] Socially, this view is precisely the opposite of that described by Chambers and his socialist heirs, for in Kolve's view stage devils function to reinforce the existing power structure.

What this book argues is that devils need not be understood either as exuberant subverters of a hegemonic social order or as proto-Enlightenment examples of failed attempts to challenge cosmic order. For stage devils are closely related to the devil of traditional religion, who is consistent with but not reducible to the devil of theology. Operating supportively within the bounds of traditional religion, stage devils reveal communal values by default, illustrating (often satirically) what fifteenth-century English society saw as most destructive of its sacral cohesion. In drama, as we shall see, the demonic threat to society was not from "below," i.e., from the lower classes. The late fourteenth-century peasants' rebellion and its occasional successors in the fifteenth century did not deter playwrights from consistently identifying the demonic threat with the crown and the aristocracy, including members of the ecclesiastical elite.[42] The mystery plays do embody social ambivalence, as we shall see in the following chapter, but it is very different from the ambivalence described by Chambers and his critical heirs. Moreover, the social function of stage devils changes late in the tradition, when devils are indeed associated exclusively with commoners. This development, however, is a product of increasing competition between commercial acting companies and of changing patterns of dramatic authorship. Ironically, the association of stage devils with the lower class, attributed by Chambers and others to repressive Christianity, actually came about only after plays had become secularized and traditional oppositional thinking made less impact on their dramaturgy.